

The U.S. Is Tackling Global Warming, Even if Trump Isn't; Op-Ed Contributors

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Highlight: Leaders from state capitols, city halls and businesses have come to a climate meeting in Bonn to say America remains committed to the Paris accord.

Body

World leaders have been meeting in Bonn, Germany, since last week to discuss carrying out the 2015 Paris climate agreement. Sadly, though not unexpectedly, the White House and federal agencies have largely been absent from the negotiating table. But American leaders from state capitols, city halls and businesses across the country have shown up in force, and we have delivered a unified message to the world: American society remains committed to our pledge under the agreement.

Over the past two months, Americans have experienced or witnessed raging wildfires and devastating storms, from Santa Rosa, Calif., to San Juan, P.R. Warming seas, along with hotter and drier days, make these storms and fires more intense and destructive. Climate change is not a future threat; it is happening now, and we are paying for it in lost lives and billions of dollars in damage.

The United States has always led the way in confronting global challenges, especially ones that profoundly affect our own country. President Trump's vow to withdraw from the Paris agreement by 2020 was a troubling abdication of that leadership, and it threatened to send a dangerously wrong message: that we are abandoning the pledge we made in Paris to reduce emissions at least 26 percent by 2025.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Most Americans strongly support the Paris agreement, and thousands of mayors, governors, chief executives and others stepped forward to reaffirm their commitment to it after the president walked away from the accord. Together, these states, cities and businesses constitute more than half of the United States economy and, if they were a separate country, would make up the third-largest economy in the world.

President Trump's action has had the effect of galvanizing these groups — and many have taken bold actions in recent months.

California just extended its landmark cap-and-trade emissions program through 2030, and has adopted incentives that will help put 1.5 million electric and other zero-emission vehicles on the road by 2025. Chicago has proposed an energy rating system for its large buildings to drive down emissions substantially, with \$70 million in projected annual savings on utility bills. Companies in a wide variety of industries — from Bloomberg to Wal-Mart — have pledged to procure 100 percent of their energy from renewable sources by 2025 or sooner. And broader trends, including falling renewable energy costs and the retirement of additional coal-fired power plants, continue to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and accelerate the decarbonization of the American economy.

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Even Oklahoma and Texas — the home states of Scott Pruitt, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and Rick Perry, the energy secretary, who both oppose the climate accord — are national leaders in wind power production. Coal is a fading energy source in both states.

Climate progress has historically been driven from the bottom-up, not the top down from Washington. Though Congress failed to pass a cap-and-trade bill to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in 2009 during the Obama administration, the United States has still reduced emissions faster and farther than any other large nation.

In fact, we are already almost halfway to reaching our Paris commitment, thanks largely to consumer preferences and market forces. Half the country's coal plants have closed or are being phased out while air quality improves and electricity bills fall for American consumers.

In the current political climate, however, there is a risk that nonfederal actions will go unrecognized by the global community. To ensure the world sees the continued commitment of the United States to tackling climate change, and the extent to which local governments and businesses are driving progress, we have introduced an initiative called America's Pledge, which will document the progress we are making — and the bolder actions we must still take — to meet our Paris commitments.

This week in Bonn, we released a report detailing existing nonfederal climate initiatives and policies across America. The report also identifies major new opportunities for cities, states and businesses to take climate action without the federal government.

For instance, more states can opt in to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a carbon pricing program involving nine Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states to drive down power plants emissions, or California's independently managed vehicle emissions programs, including its Zero Emission Vehicle Mandate, which nine states have adopted. More cities can adopt greener building codes, policies and programs to reduce electricity waste.

And more businesses can follow the lead of the 43 American supermarket chains that have committed to reducing their emissions of hydrofluorocarbons, a potent greenhouse gas used in refrigeration. Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Red Bull and Unilever have installed more than 5.5 million air-conditioning units using HFC-free refrigerants worldwide, with nearly 400,000 of those installed in the United States.

Together, these actions will strengthen the economy and improve public health, while also helping the United States move faster toward its Paris commitment. Over the next year, we will aggregate and quantify these actions and continue pushing for new efforts to speed up decarbonization.

The Paris agreement succeeded where previous attempts failed because it solicited nationally determined pledges from nations based on local actions already taking place. For the United States to reach its commitment, much more needs to be done. But the world should know: We are not waiting for Washington.

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